

USING THE EUROPEAN MODEL OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF ORGANIZATIONS. CASE STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

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Abstract

Improving quality represents for all organizations and especially for those in services one of the most important strategies for enhancing performance and competitiveness.

In the current social and economic context, the evaluation of the performance of organizations must be approached holistically. Performance means a special result, obtained in a certain field, which expresses the quality of the adjustment of the organization to the conditions in the environment. Currently, it is necessary to rethink the whole approach to the ways of evaluating performance.

The continuous quest for meeting and even surpassing clients' expectations, the involvement of all employees in the organization and the permanent improvement of quality represent important dimensions of Total Quality Management (TQM).

As any strategy, TQM comprises a series of activities which lead to meeting all the quality objectives, by optimum use of available resources and of the strengths of the organization.

The European model of excellence (the EFQM model established by the European Foundation for Quality Management) provides a set of criteria which can be applied to any enterprise and subsidiary so as to assess performance obtained through TQM. The EFQM model represents a non-prescriptive framework which recognizes the existence of numerous different approaches allowing organizations to obtain sustainable excellence. This framework contains basic concepts specific to The European Quality Award (EQA).

Our study presents the use of the European model of TQM as a reference point for management and of the improvement of the quality of services rendered by educational organizations, giving practical applicability and utility to the theoretical concepts presented. It proves that by applying the European model of excellence to assess the performance of educational organizations, a real diagnosis can be performed, which contributes to the elaboration of strategies for improving the quality of training and educational services, adapted to the realities of each school.

Keywords: educational services; improving the quality of services; total quality management; assessing performance; the general strategic chart

JEL Classification: D23, I20

Introduction

The way in which buyers perceive the quality of products and services influences in a decisive manner the image of the organization and that is why obtaining and enhancing quality represent major objectives of the latter's strategy [3].

Total Quality Management (TQM) represents a superior level of quality management, on three main aspects: one is the continuous improvement of quality; the second is the involvement of all the employees in the organization and the third is meeting and exceeding customer's expectations [8].

Applying TQM principles is all the more important for educational services, as the 'client' of these services is the pupil, the future specialist, on whose competence or lack of, depends the future of the country.

In this context, presenting the assessment models of performances organizations obtained through TQM and a case study on the use of the European model of TQM as a reference point for management and for improving the quality of educational organizations can represent, in our opinion, new challenges for all organizations in education in their attempt to meet clients' expectations and needs.

1. TQM – a strategy for improving the quality of services

It has become obvious that TQM represents a strategy for improving the performance of organizations by involving all the personnel, by continuous efforts to meet or exceed customer's expectations.

TQM is a managerial strategy that implies changes in culture and infrastructure, by using tools and techniques that would determine all the employees to cooperate and allow for a continuous enhancement of quality, as defined by the client [7].

TQM principles (which contribute to the optimal use of all its resources and to the increase in competitiveness) are: customer orientation, internalizing the relation client-supplier, putting quality first, 'zero' defects and continuous improvement, a systemic view and using data as supporting arguments [5].

The principle of continuous improvement in the educational services field is especially important in the internal audit whose role is to set the improvement objectives, as well as in the external one, whose role is to measure the efficiency of the mechanisms that determine and implement these improvements [2].

TQM in education and formation aims at obtaining teaching services based on responsibility as regards quality on all levels of the hierarchy of the educational organization, by promoting the awareness of the need for quality and an appropriate behavior. It is an effective strategy for improving the quality of services supplied by the entire personnel, as it is based on performing teaching activities, activities other than teaching or auxiliary activities of excellent quality, on time, each and every time.

2. The European model of assessing the performance of organizations through TQM

TQM is an integrated system of principles, methods and best-practice techniques which create a framework for organizations, offering them an incentive to strive for excellence in whatever they do.

Its implementation differs from an organization to another, as there is no fixed recipe for success, but a large number of models, which can help improve performance. Selecting the best model for improving performance is based on a self-assessment process [6]. The best-known models for assessing the performance of enterprises are those set by the most important awards for quality granted internationally for quality and excellence in organizations, respectively. Among these we would like to mention: The DEMING Award (Japan, 1951), The BALDRIGE Award (USA, 1987), The European Award for Quality (1991), The Romanian Award for Quality J.M. Juran (Romania, 2000), and others.

The European Award for Quality has as a reference point The European Model of TQM, the EFQM Model respectively, set by the European Foundation for Quality Management. The EFQM Model comprises nine criteria based on which the progresses recorded by organizations through TQM are assessed [1].

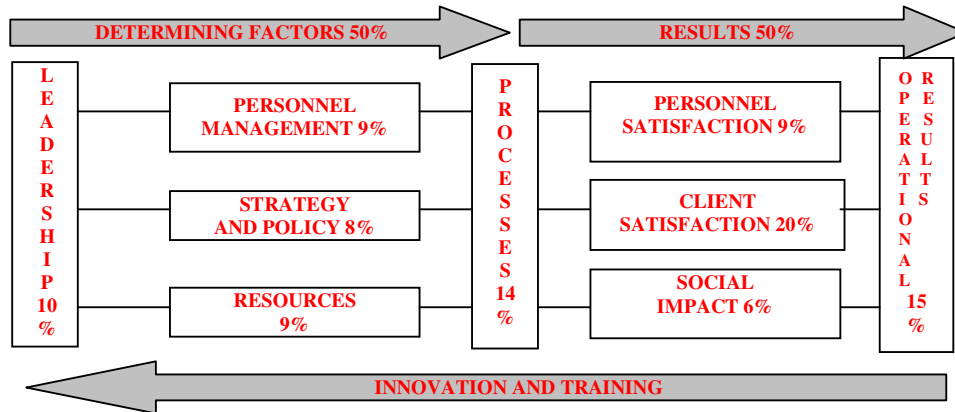


Figure 1 The EFQM model

Source: EFQM, *Self-assessment Guide for Enterprises*, The Romanian Foundation for Promoting Quality, Bucharest, 2001)

Five criteria are part of the group 'DETERMINING FACTORS': leadership, personnel management, policy and strategy, resources and processes and refer to the way in which (HOW?) the RESULTS were obtained. They represent CAUSES or PREMISES.

Four criteria are part of the 'RESULTS' group: the satisfaction of personnel, clients' satisfaction, social impact and operational results and reflect what has been obtained or is obtained (WHAT?), so they represent effects. Thus, the model highlights a relation of the cause-effect type of the way in which results were obtained.

By analysing the shares for each criterion, we can highlight the fact that in assessing performance the most important criteria are: clients' satisfaction (20%), operational results (15%) and processes (14%).

3. Research on the use of the European model of TQM as a reference point for management and for improving the quality of educational organizations

The object of research is the use of the European model of TQM as a reference point for the assessment and self-assessment of the performance of educational activities and as a starting point for outlining the setting of strategies for improvement of the quality of services [4].

3.1 Research methodology

THE AREA OF RESEARCH comprises two organizations:

- one which is acknowledged worldwide: Grupul Școlar Economic, Administrativ și de Servicii Călimănești, that has obtained international recognition, winning *The golden trophy* (London, 2003); *The platinum trophy* (New York, 2004); *The diamond trophy* (Frankfurt, 2005); *The diamond trophy* (Paris, 2006 and Geneva, 2007);
- one that is regular from the point of view of (strategic and quality) management and which has not entered a competition for improving quality (Colegiul Economic Buzău).

The hypotheses of the research were the following:

Hypothesis 1: If the EFQM model is applied to educational activities is it a real diagnosis that would contribute to finding partial strategies for improving the quality of services of training and education, with a view to obtaining sustainable excellence?

Hypothesis 2: If the assessment of performance obtained based on the criteria of the EFQM model for excellence (which represent also the reference point for the Romanian model of assessing business excellence) were to be introduced in Romania, would visible benefits arise?

Among the research objectives we can mention:

- Drawing up the general strategic chart for the organization analyzed and the one taken as reference.
- Knowing the stage reached in introducing TQM.
- Highlighting strategies of improving the quality of services of training and education in the organization with a view to improving the competitive position on the educational market.

The research has used several **methods**, among which we can mention as extremely important: *the systematic multi-criteria self-assessment with the help of the European model of TQM and the drawing up of the general strategic chart.*

The self-assessment represents, according to EFQM, the comprehensive, systematic and regular process of examination and revision of the activities and results of an organization, according to the criteria of the European model of excellence chosen as a reference point [1]. Sometimes, it can be seen as necessary to simplify a part of the terminology used and/or to include aspects specific to the educational organization and to the stages or forms of education, as can be noticed from the General strategic chart (GSC) presented below.

This can be done without prejudice to the integrity of the model and of the concepts it includes, provided that the criteria and the shares for each criterion remain unchanged.

In the EFQM view, self assessment does not necessarily mean an evaluation made by other persons than the EFQM assessors, but an evaluation made outside the official framework specific for granting application rights for the PEC, by using the same reference point, with the same objective (determining the situation of the performance of the organization), but with different goals (improving the quality of services).

The General strategic chart is a group of indicators ensuring a legible and interpretable presentation adjusted to piloting needs (the implementation of the European model of TQM). It presents information with a superior degree of processing, ensures the rapid formation of an overall view regarding the functioning of the organization and eases the drawing of conclusions, following in a balanced manner all the functions of the organization.

3.2 Research results

The General strategic chart resulted following the self assessment of performance obtained by the organization analyzed (Colegiul Economic Buzău) and the one used as a reference (GSEAS Călimănești) with the help of the European model of TQM is presented in table no. 1 (determining factors) and table no. 2 (operational results). The GSC comprises: the criteria of the EFQM model of TQM; the importance (share) for each criterion; the sub-criteria considered in the assessment or self assessment, adjusted to the educational organizations; the shares for each sub-criterion; the level of achievement, graded by the self assessment team by using a 1 to 5 grid (respectively: 1 – no progress; 2 – some progress; 3 – noticeable progress; 4 – objective reached; 5 – objective reached at superior parameters) and the average score (obtained by multiplying the share of the sub-criterion with the level of achievement).

The results obtained allow for situating CE Buzău in the group of educational organizations with an acceptable level of quality, in comparison with GSEAS Călimănești, which is part of the group of excellent educational organizations, being a leader on the Romanian educational market and on the world educational market. The scores obtained indicate the level where the organization analyzed (CEBz) is situated at the current moment, the level it must reach (the level obtained by the excellent organization - GSEASC), the distance it has to cover to get there (the differences between the GSC scores).

By analyzing the average scores obtained by each institution on sub-criteria, criteria and on the whole, we can discern the differences existent between the organization analyzed and the excellent one, the strengths and the domains in need of improvement. These offer the elements necessary for making decisions and elaborating strategies for improving quality.

Ensuing the thorough assessment and the analysis of practices, procedures and results of the excellent organization, with the help of competitive benchmarking, we found the following targets and strategic objectives which have to be taken into account by the organization analyzed so as to improve the quality of the services rendered (by categories of processes):

- Material resources: the endowment with learning equipment and means;
- Financial resources: attracting extra-budgetary funds;
- Human resources: improving the quality of the teaching staff and their activity;

- The learning process: improving the learning environment, perfecting the teaching activity, improving the quality of training in school;
- Managerial and institutional development: developing strategic management, improving quality management and the climate of the educational unit;
- The relation with the community: improving cooperation with local authorities and economic agents.

The conclusions of the research proved that the EFQM model of excellence can be used as a guide to improve organizations. This is because by comparing the results obtained with those planned and with the results of the best organizations, adequate strategies for improving customer satisfaction and for increasing consumer loyalty can be generated. Moreover, the second hypothesis formulated is verified, according to which if the assessment of performance based on the EFQM model were introduced in Romanian schools, numerous benefits would be obtained, such as: convincing personnel about the importance of knowing and introducing TQM; the formation and cohesion of personnel (by training on the application of the model); satisfying the needs of students, employees, beneficiaries, and other interested parties; developing teamwork, with objectives and deadlines which are precise, clear and achievable; assessment based on facts and not on individual perceptions; developing client orientation, and others. The self-assessment of performance based on the EFQM model is always benefic for the organization, even if an award is not won. This is because any assessment has as an **objective improving the quality and performance of the organization**.

The general strategic chart – Determining factors

Table 1

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Average score	
		CE Bz	GSE ASC
Leadership	The concrete involvement of managers in quality activities; the evaluation of the quality and efficacy of the processes of continuous improvement by high-rank managers; setting the processes offering recognition to teams and individuals for special performance; involving employees in programs of recognition of efforts regarding quality; partnership with clients and key-suppliers; promoting quality management outside the organization	24,4	48,4
Policy and strategy	Establishing the mission, vision and values of the organization regarding quality; defining clearly the process for determining and communicating the plans and objectives of the organization concerning quality leadership; setting and revising policies and strategies by using data from internal as well as external sources and from bench marketing	22,0	40,0

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Average score	
		CE Bz	GSE ASC
Personnel management	Clearly defined process for planning the use of human resources; periodic assessment of staff morale; setting up and using skills profiles; effective and credible methods for setting personal or team objectives; the positive trend regarding the number of persons involved in improvement activities; the efficacy of involvement in the improvement process; the efficacy of education and training; evaluations for monitoring fields of study and teaching methods; periodical reviewing the efficacy of methods used in communicating with employees; steps followed for improving communication from the top down, to the top and between functions	19,6	42,5
Resources	The modality for improving data and information analysis in the last two years; the way in which the processes that introduce, evaluate and improve technologies were optimized; relevant, accessible and readily available information for the staff; uses benchmarking for key parameters regarding performance compared to competitors, leaders and/or other internal or external organizations	20,0	45,0
Processes	Clear set of critical processes; processes used for obtaining services are managed, controlled and improved by using adequate objectives; determines and revises regularly the attributes of critical processes such as performance parameters which it needs to monitor; data on the majority of the key internal operations/processes; performance is regularly analyzed and revised and corrective measures are adopted by the managers in charge; stimulation, innovation and creativity in the improvement process	37,8	67,9

The general strategic chart – Operational results

Table 2

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Average score	
		CE Bz	GSE ASC
Client satisfaction	Frequent and regular research on relevant groups of clients; process for establishing the relevance and relative importance of the attributes, products and services subjected to research; analyzes and segments the groups of clients, separately identifies their demands and expectations; there is easy access to clients requesting assistance or filing complaints; the trend regarding the overall level of client satisfaction is positive; the level of client satisfaction is comparable to that of the leaders'; trends regarding gaining/losing customers and market share	48,8	97,2
Personnel satisfaction	Measuring the satisfaction of employees; the trend towards quality training offered to employees; the positive trend regarding morale, absenteeism, turnover, safety, satisfaction, discontent of employees; the individual and team efforts are recognized and rewarded according to the contribution to quality improvement; trends of recognition and/or rewarding of efforts towards quality are measured; additional forecasting indicators for measuring employee satisfaction	19,4	43,7
Social impact	Data reflecting social perception on its performance; the organization participates actively in the community; adopts measures for reducing discomfort caused to neighbors; the activities undertaken for preserving global resources; recordings of external complaints or awards for the influence of the organization on society	14,5	28,6
Operational results	The results obtained are compared with research, studies, external benchmarking; the values of these indicators have ascending trends; the correlation between the performance obtained and the improvement activities adopted is understood; if there are unfavorable trends, these are understood and corrective measures are successfully implemented; the current level and the trend for a parameter were comparable to the leaders	36,6	72,2
General total		243,1	485,5

The results can be synthesized in table no. 3.

The synthesis of results

Table 3

Criterion	Average score	
	Colegiul Ec. Buzău	GSEAS Călimănești
Leadership	24,4	48,4
Policy and strategy	22,0	40,0
Personnel management	19,6	42,5
Resources	20,0	45,0
Processes	37,8	67,9
Client satisfaction	48,8	97,2
Personnel satisfaction	19,4	43,7
Social impact	14,5	28,6
Operational results	36,6	72,2
General total	243,1	485,5

Conclusions

TQM is a strategy which contributes to improving the quality of training and educational services, of learning-teaching processes and assessment and of the system of quality in educational organizations. It offers the latter solutions to meet the challenges coming from the external environment, in each of the four phases of the institutional life cycle, made up of: formation, growth, maturity and decline or renewal and revitalization.

Assessing the performance obtained by organizations by introducing TQM can be made with the help of the models that served as points of reference for obtaining quality awards. These offer organizations a coherent set of criteria that can be used for the assessment or self-assessment of performance obtained through TQM. The best known models for evaluating the performance obtained by enterprises correspond to the awards granted for quality and organizational excellence: The DEMING Award, The BALDRIGE Award, The European Award for Quality, The Romanian Award for Quality J.M. Juran.

The research on the use of the European model of TQM as a reference point for the management and improvement of the quality of educational organizations gives practical applicability and utility to the theoretical concepts presented.

Both hypotheses of the research were verified, proving that by applying the European model of excellence to assess the performance of educational organizations, a real diagnosis is made, which contributes to the elaboration of strategies for improving the quality of training and educational services, adapted to the realities in each school. Moreover, if the evaluation of performance based on the EFQM model of excellence were introduced in Romanian schools, numerous benefits would arise.

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